



DIPLOMACY AS A VERITABLE TOOL OF SUSTAINABILITY IN MULTIRACIAL ILORIN EMIRATE POLITY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Onagun Rasheed, Ph.D.

Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

onagun.r@unilorin.edu.ng; onagun.rasheed@yahoo.com

Abstract

The overthrow of power and establishment of the northern emirate in Ilorin was accompanied by a lot of challenges and threats from the allies of the annihilated political entity. Several wars and uprisings were waged by the Yoruba folk and their allies in a bid to winning back their lost territory. The new Fulani emirate political order responded through aggression and display of diplomacy in consolidating and sustaining its hegemonic rule in Ilorin and her dependencies. This paper exhibits the internal and external diplomatic methods employed by the Fulani political elites in protecting and sustaining her dynastic rule in the 19th century. The paper explores extant literatures and oral evidences to unravel the extent through which diplomatic tools such as tolerance, politics of involvements and consultation had ensured victory, peaceful coexistence and prosperity in the heterogeneous Ilorin emirate of the 19th century.

Key Words: Ilorin Emirate, Fulani, Afonja, Balogun, Alaafin, War, Yoruba land

Introduction

Ilorin emerged in a unique ecological and geographical area where the open savannah belt in the north shares a common border with the forest zone to the south of present day Nigeria.¹ The origin of the term 'Ilorin' has been illuminated divergently by several scholars. In the opinion of some, Ilorin was said to have derived its name from 'Ilu –Irin', which means a town where hunters, farmers and other users of iron sharpened their implements. A compound known as Ile-Ilorin in Idi-Ape area of the town reinforces the point that Ilorin was indeed a place of iron smelting. Another version also named Bamidele compound in Ilorin as the place where the sharpening of iron around Ilorin took place.² One finds in this compound an ancient rock, small in size, where hunters often sharpened their implements at the early stage of the evolution of what is now known as 'Ilorin'.³ It was assumed that the town earned her name from the ancient rock 'Ilo Irin', 'an implement used in sharpening iron'.

Other scholars defined it as Ilu-Erin, which signifies that it is a place where elephants gathered and assembled. There is certainly an area known as Oko-Erin, which means an enclave where hunters searched for elephant in the early days of the evolution of Ilorin. More so, the geographical position of the Ilorin area as a transitional zone between open savannah and forest would sustain large wild animals which would have made it necessary for hunters to produce well-sharpened implements for their hunting expeditions.⁴ In a similar manner, a source explicates that the town derived its name from either the search for iron implement which a man, possibly a hunter, had lost, or stems from



the fact that Ilorin was a place for hunting elephants.⁵ The presence of Sobi hills and other rock stones in the immediate area provided suitable grounds for hunters to sharpen their hunting implements.⁶

The origin of Ilorin is surrounded by divergent historical opinions and accounts. There is no doubt that the origin of Ilorin as a collective settlement or a single town is shrouded in a deep and as yet an insolvable uncertainty when viewed from a historical perspective.⁷ Since years back till contemporary time, there are historical accounts, assertions and counter claims which are controversial and inclusive, as to the confirmed foundation of the ancient history of Ilorin. These controversies were borne out of over-reliance of oral tradition in tracing and reconstruction of the history of Ilorin and other African societies. This factor has warranted the thoughtfulness and objectivity of historians in the reconstruction of history of Ilorin from a mini and compact to a walled and centralized political entity. In view of this, it is thereby reckoned that Ilorin originated from the period when it had no organized political structure and defense mechanism. This mythical tradition was based on the individual founding of a trifling Ilorin community. The second phase was the Mid-18th century accounts of the old Oyo ascendancy, and the linking of Afonja's personality to the founding of Ilorin. The most important phase was Fulani political expansion and supremacy and the making of a southern Muslim Emirate.

Pre Nineteen Century Ilorin History

The first era in the history of Ilorin was one tagged with individual founding of Ilorin narrated by different mythical hypotheses. The foremost in this regard is the Ojo Isekuse factor in the foundation of Ilorin. Some oral and written hypothesis suggest that he migrated from Oyo, while others assumed he originated from several other parts of Yoruba land such as Gambe-Ilotta near Eji, Eminla among others.⁸ Ojo Isekuse was said to be a Yoruba hunter who found Ilorin to be most suitable for his hunting activities and for his purpose, he decided to migrate from his old settlement (not identifiable) to the present site of Ilorin. The tradition further claims that it was the settlement of Ojo in the present site of Ilorin that attracted other settlers that later swelled its population. However, the tradition concludes that it was at the time Ilorin had grown in population that Ojo committed an abominable crime that forced him to migrate out of the new settlement.⁹ Similarly, Sheikh Abu Ikokoro the author of Ta'lif also informed us that Ilorin was founded by a hunter called Ayinla before Afonja arrived and supposes that Ayinla vacated his hut in favour of Afonja and went elsewhere.¹⁰

Another individual also associated with the founding of Ilorin was one man called "Asaju". He was also said to be a hunter, who combined his hunting activities with farming. He was also said to have found the present site of Ilorin suitable for these activities, hence, he migrated to the site.¹¹ The tradition also claims that it was Asaju's settlement in Ilorin that attracted other settlers who conferred on him the appellation of *Asaju* which means the 'leader' that eventually became his adopted name.¹² A critical evaluation of these traditions shows that it is extremely difficult to accept any of these tales as authentic root of the foundation of Ilorin. The Ilorin historian is thereby compelled to correlate these traditions with the contemporary events to elicit an acceptable and suitable theory on the origin of Ilorin.

One of the most popular historical hypotheses was the supposition that traced the origin of Ilorin to the old Oyo ascendancy and the forefathers of Afonja. The detail surrounding this tradition explains that, Ilorin was part of the larger and centralized political entity of the old Oyo Empire. Subsequently, Ilorin attracted more relevance and popularity due to her strategic geographical location as a



transition belt between the forest and savannah region. Ilorin had served as the northern boundary and belonged to the *Ekun Osi*, meaning left flank of the metropolitan province of the old Oyo Empire.¹³ The vast movement of goods and people along the route brought about the need to secure the area by putting in place a more organized political hegemony.

The king of the old Oyo Empire decided to extend the tentacles of his political authority to Ilorin basically to sustain the wealth and supremacy of the nation. The king of the old empire made Ilorin a solidly fortified entity in order to avoid the wrath of its marauding neighbors and several aggressive wandering tribes. Additionally, the desire of Alaafin Ojigi in the 17th century to save the Igbomina people who he regarded as his kith and kin, from the Nupe rulers who used the place as a slave reservoir, must have encouraged him to first establish his authority in Ilorin to ease the extension of his control of the area.¹⁴ Law indicates that it was Alaafin Ojigi (1698-1732) who first appointed an Oyo man, Laderin, as a Baale of Ilorin, primarily to defend Oyo's interest in the Ilorin area against Nupe incursion.¹⁵ The Alaafin apparently felt insecure with the Nupe threat, but not with the inhabitants of Ilorin.¹⁶ In view of this, the king delegated his authority to a political agent known as *Baale* or *Ajele*, who was meant to act on his behalf on security, economic and political issues. On behalf of the king, *Baale* or *Ajele* (the political agent) was to collect custom duties and other taxes from the moving caravans, and the residents of Ilorin. Available evidence revealed that Laderin, the great grandfather of Afonja founded a politically solidified Ilorin community, and served as the first Ajele appointed by the king of Oyo of his time. In fact, Laderin's effort in collaboration with Alaafin led to the amalgamation of the formally scattered settlers.

Furthermore, the tradition maintains that Ilorin was founded by the forefathers and descendant of Afonja. The city was built by his grandfather Laderin, whose prosperity bore rule in her succession to the fourth generation. Laderin the founder was succeeded by Pasin, his son, a valiant chief who opposed the renowned Gaha when he was in the zenith of his glory. Fearing his rising power, Gaha drove him out of Ilorin and he escaped to Ola.¹⁷ Gaha sent an army after him there who reduced the town and Pasin was taken and slain. Alugbin the son of Pasin succeeded his father, and in turn handed the government to his valiant son Afonja with whom the rule ended.¹⁸

Many scholars lay claim to Laderin's foundation of a centralized and a more organized polity in Ilorin. He was said to have settled, reigned and ruled the town from his base and seat of power in Idi-ape. The extent of laderin's political consciousness became demonstrated when he gradually consolidated himself as a sole administrator and established his rule in Ilorin, the process which invariably brought his descendants, notably Pasin, Alugbin and finally, Afonja into succession as Baale.¹⁹ The appointment of the first three individuals, Laderin, Pasin and Alugbin was clearly at the discretion of the Alaafin, who was expected to nominate those he was favorably disposed to.²⁰ The Alaafin could equally remove a Baale whose performance fell short of the expectation of the palace.²¹ For instance, Alugbin, father of Afonja was deposed by Alaafin Abiodun for his weakness in handling the Nupes who persisted in disturbing the region.²²

It is evident that Ilorin's acceptance of Oyo's appointees was a reflection of its submission to Oyo's overlordship. It is again probable that Laderin's ability to perpetuate himself in power was enhanced by the readiness of those he met in Ilorin to tolerate him and his children and even when they were not actively represented in Laderin's government. The politics of cooperation and exclusion which began as early as the mid-18th century had remained a key feature of governance in Ilorin.²³ It could be deduced from the above that there had been settlements of various groups of people, and that the



community was not originally founded from the scratch by Laderin. Additionally, the significance of the control of Ilorin from Oyo earned her an organized political mechanism which took place during the time of Laderin to Pasin his son and then Alugbin and Aare Afonja. This was meant to suppress the threat of the Nupe and other aggressive power mongers, and to expand the strength of the nation.

The full establishment of Oyo Empire's rule in Ilorin through its Ajele resulted in the recognition of the community as a distinct political entity. Its values and potentials were quickly appreciated and this brought about the dramatic changes of its social, economic and political status.²⁴ The long distance traders, travellers, religion crusaders and wanderers that had been traversing Ilorin to their destinations such as Oyo, Sabe, Saki, Ijebu, Ibadan and other Yoruba nation, the Hausaland, Nupeland and several parts of Africa such as Sudan and Mali were soon to find Ilorin a more central and suitable place for their activities. Ilorin became more fortified and secured. The status of Ilorin as the first big and organized settlement after crossing the River Niger to the South West resulted to the migration of new settlers into the community. The new status of Ilorin had attracted many of these peoples in their different destinations to join their kith and kin who had previously settled in Ilorin since the time unknown to anyone. These migration and interaction further boosted economic and social activities in Ilorin. Trade relations and other interactions between these peoples grew, so also the overall growth of Ilorin. Ilorin thereby became a heterogeneous society and a cultural melting point where people of different origins lived and carried out their activities peacefully and harmoniously.

An elaborate Hausa community, a new and big market began to emerge around the Gambari area. This further gave rise to the *Mai Gida* system, a situation whereby the Hausa resident of Ilorin hosted their kinsmen who came to the town for commercial purpose. If the Hausa trader came with goods to sell, he would not sell a single one without the knowledge of his host, and if he comes to buy goods, he would go in company of the host. In any way by which the *Mai Gida* was involved in trade transactions, he was paid a percentage of the sale or purchase as his own commission.²⁵ Another middlemanship system known as *Jawo* also emerged among the settlers of the Gambari ward of the Ilorin community. It was not mandatory for the *Jawo* middlemen to accommodate their clients, what matters were for them to ensure smooth business transactions between them and the Ilorin local merchants. They were found everywhere around the market place looking for deals to broker between foreign and local merchants.²⁶ He was also paid a *Laada* known as a certain percentage of the proceeds of the sales or purchase. Their affairs were overseen by the office of the Sarkin Gambari, an office that had been in place in Ilorin before the collapse of Oyo and subsequent establishment of the Emirate.²⁷ Moreso, there was an evidence of the existence of an autonomous Fulani herdsmen community known as Olufadi Fulani group before the Afonja and Alimi episode in the history of Ilorin.

The Oke Male settlers are another known and prominent set of people during the reign of the Oyo Ajele in Ilorin. Many believed that their migration from Mali earn them the appellation *Oke- Mali*, which was later corrupted to *Oke Male*. Others also held on to the belief that they might have migrated from Niger, Borno and they could also be Mande traders from Sierra Leone, from wherever they came, they were known for trading activities and Islamic scholarship and evangelization mission.²⁸ It is not impossible that these Ilorin Muslims are descendants of Wangara lineages who traced their origin to old Mali.²⁹ These people were said to have found a solid mini Islamic community of Ilorin, with which other Muslim migrants and subsequent settlers from the Hausa,



Nupe, Kanuri, and several parts of Oyo Empire pitched their tent. In the early years of Ilorin, the settlement of the Malians were distinct from those of the Yoruba that lived near them, but they gradually got integrated as more of the indigenous Yoruba settlers accepted Islam.³⁰ These people on their part brought into Ilorin market items such as woven cloths and other household materials in exchange for European goods from the coast. In the process of trading, they established Quranic schools and converted many of the indigenous population of Ilorin to Islam.³¹

Other units of notable settlement that emerged during the period of Oyo ascendancy was the Okesuna, Okekere, Okelele, Okekura, Oke Aluko, and Oke Anifowose among others, which were made up of specific group of migrants from different places.³² For instance, the settlers of Okesuna were prominent Islamic scholars, teachers and preachers that migrated from various places parts of Borno and Hausaland, and Kuwo, Kobayi, Gbanda, Kobe and other parts of Yorubaland, where Islamic culture and traditions had been fully established.³³ As a vassal province of the old Oyo Empire, the units of settlements in Ilorin were coordinated under the authority of the empire's Ajele of the community.³⁴ Ilorin thereby became a nucleus of diverse linguistic grouping, culture and tribe. Subsequently, intermarriage, trade and predominance of Islamic religion further strengthen the relationship among these peoples. There existed cordial relationship among the units of settlements in Ilorin because they all looked on to the authority of Oyo Empire for protection and instruction.³⁵

Afonja's Factor in the Foundation of Ilorin

The death of the notorious Bashorun Gaha ushered in a long, peaceful and prosperous reign by Alaafin Abiodun, whose reign is widely acknowledged as the golden age of the Oyo Empire.³⁶ The Alaafin appreciated the patriotic and heroic contribution made by Kakanfo Oyabi to this attainment but his desire to demonstrate gratitude in reciprocation by bestowing special Honour on the Kakanfo never materialized.³⁷ This was because he and his deputy Alugbin, Afonja's father died shortly after his meritorious service to the nation. After the death of these duo, Afonja of Ilorin thereby demanded the title; but as prince (through the mother) the title was below his rank, for the Kakanfo ranks after the Bashorun, but being the highest military title, it suited his restless nature best, and so he obtained it, almost by force.³⁸

Alaafin Abiodun Adegolu's long reign came to an abrupt and tragic end in 1789, his death having been hastened by poison administered on him by his over-ambitious eldest son, the *Aremo*, who was too eager to succeed his father on the throne. According to Johnson, the end of his reign marked an important epoch in Yoruba history. With the death of Alaafin Abiodun ended the universal and despotic rule of the Alaafin of Oyo in the Yoruba country. He was the last of the kings that held the different parts of the kingdom in one universal sway and with him ended the tranquility and prosperity of the Yoruba country.

The reign of the succeeding Alaafin Aole was an unfortunate and calamitous one, as it marked the beginning of the decline of the nation. At that period, the cup of iniquity of the nation was full. Cruelty, usurpation and treachery were rife, especially in the capital; and the provinces were groaning under the yolk of oppression.³⁹ Confiscation and slavery for the slightest offence became the order of the day, and the tyranny, exactions and lawlessness of the princes and other members of the royal family were simply insupportable.⁴⁰ Inflicting of constant and frequent war on the king's enemies served as one of the basis of the nation's power. War campaigns and uprisings assisted the Yoruba country not only in expanding, securing and safeguarding its territory; but also in amazing wealth through bounties in slaves, land, animals and agricultural produce among others.



On Alaaḥin Aole's accession, the time came for him to send out his first expedition as the custom demands. He sent out his first expedition to *Baale* Apomu whom he referred to as his first enemy. *Baale* Apomu had crossed his path by humiliating and giving him the flogging of his life when he was a prince, for engaging in slave raiding. When the expedition was sent to him, in order to save his town and people from destruction, he committed suicide, and his head was cut off and sent to Oyo to appease the offended monarch.⁴¹ When he was asked of another enemy to be attacked, he named the powerful chief Afonja the *Aaare Ona Kakanfo* residing in Ilorin with great reluctance, as he foresaw evil ahead.⁴²

Alaaḥin's conspiracy against Afonja marked a significant epoch in the history of the collapse of the Empire. He secretly connived with some Oyo chiefs to send Aare Afonja, the war generalissimo to attack Iwere, an impregnable and a naturally fortified town, referred to as a mission or war of no return. Analogously, it was a taboo for Oyo to attack a town that had at one time produced a queen and notable King's mother; as Iwere was the maternal birthplace of an ancient Alaaḥin Ajagbo. It was however arranged that he should not be forewarned, but as it were to that place until he found himself at the foot of the hill on which Iwere was built; hence it was given out that war was declared against Gbeji.⁴³ Fortunately for him, private intelligence had gotten the Kakanfo intimated with all the plots and intrigues going on in the capital.⁴⁴ However as the intrigue was ongoing, two other circumstances had caused disaffection between two powerful chiefs Bashorun and Owota (one of the royal guard, *Eso*), and the king. On these two occasions, the king's action and judgments injured and disrespected the pride and honor of these chiefs. Thus, the two chiefs Bashorun and Owota who were heads of the troops from the capital formed a conspiracy with Aare Afonja when the time became ripe for execution.

The expedition was seen as one aimed at total destruction of Afonja and other powerful chiefs that had served as threat to power and authority of the king. The connivance of the war lords from the capital and provinces manifested at the entrance of the Iwere town, and the long awaited mutiny and revolution ignited. The insurgent chiefs sent words back that the royal party had offended them and that the result had proved unfortunate.⁴⁵ An order was thereby sent back to the king to surrender the capital by committing suicide due to his rejection. Before the king committed suicide, he was reported to have casted some spell and curses on his distractors, which had a lasting impact on the future of Ilorin and Yoruba nation. According to Johnson,

there being no alternative, His Majesty set his house in order; but before he committed suicide, he stepped out into the palace quadrangle with face stern and resolute, carrying in his hands an earthenware dish and arrows. He shot one to the north, one to the south, and one to the west uttering ever-memorable imprecations, "my curse be on ye for your disloyalty and disobedience, so let your children disobey you. If you send them on errand, let them never return to bring you word again. To all the points I shot my arrows will ye be carried as slaves. My curse will carry you to the sea and beyond the seas, slaves will rule over you, and you their masters will become slaves."⁴⁶

From this time, the spirit of rebellion and independence began to spread throughout the kingdom.⁴⁷ Afonja the Aare Ona Kakanfo in Ilorin and Opele of Gbogun were the first to proclaim their



independence, and other chiefs soon followed their examples.⁴⁸ This was the commencement of the break-up of the unity of Yoruba kingdom, and the beginning of the tribal independence.⁴⁹ Each warrior and provincial heads of the territories returned back home to renounce the overlordship of Oyo king. From then henceforth, the provinces ceased from paying tributes in homage and taxes to the capital. They withdrew their loyalty and vested it in their respective provinces. Afonja returned back to home not only to proclaim the independence, but also to make Ilorin the most formidable in the Yoruba nation and beyond. At the end of the Eighteenth Century, Ilorin became the headquarters of Afonja, the rebel general who catalyzed that empire's downfall, and began to attract an influx of population including Yoruba, Hausa, and Fulani groups.⁵⁰ The quest of consolidating his power inspired him to seek the cooperation of several interest groups, which metamorphosed to the invitation of Sheu Alimi and the saga that had a lasting impact on the history of Ilorin. It opened new phases of relations between Ilorin and other independent Yoruba State on one hand and between Hausa slaves and Aare Afonja on the other hand.⁵¹

After the proclamation of independence and self-determination for Ilorin, Afonja initiated several measures to consolidate his power. He rallied the support of leaders of several interest groups inhabiting the Ilorin metropolis, out of which Sholagberu, his age-long friend, a Muslim scholar and trader were. Being fully aware of the fact that all the powers he had were sourced through Yoruba traditional means, and that they could be destroyed through the influence of the Alaafin's supporters, the Aare sought for an independent source of powers to survive his confrontation with Oyo authorities.⁵² It could also be that, Aare sought for other source of power such as the Muslim medicine, so as to make him the most powerful king and empire builder, and make Ilorin the center of gravity of the Yoruba nation and beyond. It was in his best interest to maintain cordial relationship with the Muslims. From the military point of view, Muslim trade was a source of horses, and Muslim slaves from the north had traditionally provided a large number of highly skilled cavalymen and grooms to Oyo's army.⁵³ Muslim charms were also highly priced by the Afonja's army and by Yoruba warriors in general.⁵⁴ Afonja extended the hands of fellowship to the Muslims and other interest groups so as to earn him access to their support in subverting and destabilizing the power of the Alaafin, and any other enemies that could stand his way in turning Ilorin to centre of unity of the Yorubaland.

Through Sholagberu, Afonja came to know Shehu Alimi, a renowned Islamic scholar and cleric, who had travelled to many parts of Yorubaland before settling down at Kuwo, a village not too far from Ilorin. In order to strengthen his hands in the enterprise he was about to undertake, he encouraged and invited Alimi to come down to settle in Ilorin, and to serve as his priest.⁵⁵ Both of them became best of friends. Alimi in response to his call came with his Hausa slaves and made Ilorin his home.⁵⁶ The arrival of Mallam Al-Salih in Ilorin in 1817 transformed the position of Islam in the city, as it increased Ilorin's appeal to Muslims from other parts of Yorubaland.⁵⁷ All the Hausa slaves in the adjacent towns hitherto employed as barbers, rope maker, and cowherd, now deserted their masters and flocked to Ilorin under the standard of Afonja the Kakanfo, and were protected against their masters.⁵⁸ Under Sholagberu standard also flocked Mohammedans from Gbanda, Agoho, Kuwo and Kobe.⁵⁹ They were all Muslims and settled in Okesuna quarters.

From this time began the war of consolidation and expansion of Afonja's political hegemony in Ilorin. Although Afonja as the war commander and generalissimo had a large retinue of warriors under his fold in Ilorin and in the provinces of other loyal friends, he relied heavily on the strength of the slave soldiers also known as *Jama* whom most were loyal to Shehu Alimi. These restless



Jama served as Afonja's veritable instrument in raiding and destroying many Igbomina and Ibolu towns; and in suppressing the uprising of Ojo Agunbambaru, the son of the tyrant Bashorun Gaha. Several successes recorded by these Jama motivated Alimi to over-rate them over his own long time standing army. Their triumph and accomplishment turned Afonja to a sole power in the kingdom. Subsequently, the Jama became so powerful to the extent that, Afonja's authority became non-binding over them. He had unlimited conference in the Jamas, and was unaware of the growing disaffection and disloyalty towards himself.⁶⁰ They operated with impunity and turned Ilorin to a lawless community whenever they are not engaged in any war. During these periods, they stole, raped, confiscated peoples' properties, grabbed lands, and committed also sorts of crime with impunity. Whenever Alimi their principal was requested to caution them, the usual response was to encourage Afonja to engage the Jama in War or raiding. Johnson wrote that,

the Jamas were increasing in number and in rapacity, to the utter distress and ruin of the country. When there was no war in hand they usually scattered themselves all over the land plundering the people and committing outrages. They would enter any house, make it their headquarters, from which they would pillage the neighborhood and the surrounding districts. They fed upon the cattle of the house and led the rest away at their leisure and pleasure.⁶¹

At the long run, Afonja resorted to disband and put an end to the excesses of the Jama, but misconstrued his own might and strength. He thought he could put them down whenever he liked, and was sometimes very severe with any act of insubordination, openly threatening them with suppression and annihilation.⁶² Afonja's threats only worsened the disaffection of the Jamas against him. Long time of impunity of the Jamas increased their confidence, which soon sparked an open confrontation and outrage between them and Afonja their landlord. Long time over-reliance on the Jamas and the subsequent fragmentations resulted in complete feebleness and powerlessness of Afonja. His total confidence in the Jamas made Afonja to accord less respect to members of his long standing Yoruba army. For instance, Fagbohun the chief of Jabata, the commander of the left wing of Afonja's army incurred his wrath for speaking and warning against the excesses of the Jamas. Fagbohun had to flee and escaped to his town for safety when he heard he was to be killed by Afonja for speaking ill of the deeds of the then Afonja's beloved slave soldier. Similarly, the death of his brother Agbonrin, and his head slave Lasipa made him loose his mainstay, for these were men of power.⁶³

When an uprising or what was referred to as Holy Jihad and a coup was taken up against Afonja, he had not only become powerless and hopeless, he was also completely helpless. The private messages sent to other powerful provincial chiefs all went into futility. On realizing this, the Jamas swift into action and assassinated Aare Afonja and summarily terminated the Yoruba oligarchic rule in Ilorin. The death of Afonja was followed by episodes characterized by the eradication and elimination of elements of opposition to the newly emerging Fulani ruling elites led by Alimi's children. The desire of AbdulSalami and Shitta, the first and second Emirs in Ilorin to collaborate with the rampaging slave soldiers Jama originally recruited by Aare Afonja, was to establish a dynasty of absolute rule in Ilorin.⁶⁴



Foundation of Ilorin as an Emirate

The formal establishment of Ilorin Emirate can be dated to about 1823 with the appointment of Abdulsalam, the son of Shehu Alimi as the first Emir.⁶⁵ An extensive Fulani political hegemony became a reality immediately after the demise of Shehu Alimi, who became the most powerful and notable political elite and leader after the departure of the Afonja era. The leadership of the Muslim community headed by Mallam Salih fell on his son AbdulSalami (1823-1836) who subsequently emerged as the first Emir of Ilorin with the success of the Jihad there and the consequent creation of the Ilorin Emirate.⁶⁶ With the establishment of the emirate, Islam became a State religion and the Emir and his cabinet were duty bound to adhere to the Sharia.⁶⁷ Alimi's children adopted internal and external diplomacy to create relations to stabilize the new political system.⁶⁸ The political structure of the Emirate was largely structured by the first Emir, Abd al Salam (1823-1836), who undertook the creation of many offices for efficient administration.⁶⁹ The emergent Fulani ruling elites exhibited and maintained a high degree of diplomacy and religion sentiment in carrying every major ethnic and interest groupings along. It is important to note that certain significant considerations influenced and stimulated the creation of offices and political hierarchy for the smooth administration of Ilorin Emirate. Among these were the ethnic diversity and heterogeneity of the Emirate, and also the need to adequately compensate the leaders of the different groups who played worthwhile roles in the revolution and struggle for Fulani hegemonic rule in Ilorin. Relatedly, the new political elite put in place an inclusive representation of all ethnic groups in order to ensure a reliable military preparation for any opposition against the newly proclaimed Emirate of Ilorin.

Consequently, wards were created to accommodate the interest groups that constituted Ilorin and their leaders (warlords). The four wards were placed under the control of the War lords known as Baloguns representing the various ethnic and interest groupings within the Ilorin Population, and the later Emir's ward administered by Magagingeri, a Fulani man by tribe and close associate of the Emir.⁷⁰ Baloguns Fulani represents and headed the Fulani ward, while Balogun Gambari represents the ward which comprises migrant settlers such as Hausa, Kemberi, Nupes, Kannike, Kanuri, Gobir, and other tribes that originated from several parts of what later became known as northern Nigeria. The Yorubas as the predominant ethnic group had two Baloguns which were, Ajikobi and Alanamu. The creation of two Yoruba Baloguns out of four largely confirmed the preponderance of the Yoruba ethnic group in Ilorin, and the desire to bring them into the mainstream of the Emirate's socio-political affairs especially after the Afonja episode.⁷¹

Internally, in order to guarantee a smooth administration of the Emirate, leaders of several grouping that made up the emirate were incorporated into the polity. For instance, Olufadi, the leader of the Olufadi Fulani group, Dose, the leader of the Hausa group and Usman and later Yesufu Baale, the leaders of the Yoruba group, were all appointed as Amir al Jaish (Head of the Army) or Balogun of their respective linguistic unit and members of the emirate council.⁷² On the external front, Abdulsalam wrote to the caliph in Sokoto pledging his loyalty and seeking support for the establishment of an emirate in Ilorin. The caliph agreed and Ilorin was declared an Emirate, with AbdulSalami as the Emir.⁷³

Ilorin metropolis was divided into five wards administered by the aforementioned heroes, and the batons continued to rotate among their lineage. Each of these Balogun enjoyed some degree of autonomy within their areas of jurisdiction. Each of these wards was further divided into sub-wards or compound headship; for instance Ajikobi included Ajikobi, Ojuekun, Ogidi, Oloje and Zarumi



sub-wards. Law and order were maintained in these sub-wards and compounds by the Magajis, Baale, and Ajia (known as junior war lord) who were all subjected to the authority of the Balogun.

As it was expected by the new political elites, the declaration of Ilorin as an emirate sparked an outrage and war by the Oyo authority, which saw it as an affront and attempt to infiltrate the land by foreigners. Consequently, the political oligarchy headed by the Emir and these war lords (Balogun) embarked several defensive wars to guarantee, sustain and safeguard their survival. This resulted in her constant brawl with Oyo in the 1830s. Among such wars were the Mugbamugba war and the Eleduwe war of 1836 in which the combined forces of Oyo and Bariba were defeated by the Ilorin forces, and Oyo was eventually sacked.⁷⁴ By this, Ilorin was spared from further major threat on its capital. Oyo became completely deserted and the position of its King became a mere nominal institution.

Afterward, the Fulani dynasty and Emirate in Ilorin changed its desire to territorial expansion in order to earn her economic and political benefit. Ilorin, among other things wanted to fill the political vacuum created by the downfall of Oyo Empire. The involvement of Ilorin Emirate army in the Nineteenth Century warfare that engulfed the entire Yorubaland naturally opened the Baloguns and the entire Emirate army to various military encounters. The Baloguns or war commanders were the central figures in the wars.⁷⁵ As a matter of fact, the Baloguns' charismatic leadership in military campaigns gave no little fillip to Ilorin imperial exploits in Nineteenth Century Igbomina.⁷⁶ Therefore, within a few years of its foundation, Ilorin had succeeded in bringing many Igbomina towns such as Igbaja, Ajasse, Omupo, and many others as part of the Province. Similarly, the Ibolo territories of the old Oyo kingdom namely Offa and Erin became part of the Emirate.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Ilorin southward military campaign was not without success, as she successfully brought many Ekiti towns such as Otun, Obbo, Idofin, Osi, Odo-Owa, Iloffo, Isapa, Eruku, Aiyedun and others under its control. These dependencies were brought under the political control of Ilorin during the reign of Emir Shitta (1836-1861).⁷⁸ In all these towns the local rulers were retained in their domain but were watched by Ilorin Ajeles.⁷⁹ However, the ambition of Ilorin to push further south was nipped in the bud by the emergence of Ibadan. This was because in a clash at Osogbo, Ibadan forces defeated the Ilorin forces.

These four Baloguns and war lords controlled these aforementioned areas conquered outside Ilorin as their fiefs and dependencies. This factor increased their powers and influences in the administration of the Emirate. No doubt the ability of the Ilorin war lords (Balogun) to participate in both military and judicial processes greatly enhanced their power and this perhaps was responsible for the precarious situation the throne found itself by the end of the Nineteenth Century by which time the Emir's power had almost completely been usurped by the Baloguns.⁸⁰ The Baloguns often appointed notable warriors as Resident known as Alangua among the Hausas and Fulanis and Baale among the Yorubas, to administer the conquered areas.⁸¹ As demonstration of mutual respect and interest, some of the areas acquired or conquered by the respective Balogun were given as gifts to the Emir, who in turn appointed members of his family as Daudu for the area.⁸² Apart from the fact that these Residents amass wealth in terms of tolls and royalties, he also represented the interest of his principal and sponsor in Ilorin.

These historical relations and phenomenon persisted until the conquest and establishment of formal colonial government at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Several colonial and post-colonial restructuring had stripped Ilorin Emirate of her formal pre-colonial dependencies of Ibolo and



several parts of Igbomina land. The contemporary Ilorin Emirate structure was left only with her immediate suburbs and fiefs which are its northern districts such as areas like Lanwa, Ejidongari, Oloru, Afon, Akanbi and Owode district among many others. Moreover, because of the hostilities of the Baloguns and the British quest for an effective centralized administration and indirect rule, the Emirs were made superior to the Baloguns. The Emirs thereby administered these remaining fiefs that made up the Emirate, and henceforth appointed their loyalists as Residents and Colonial Agents.

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